SHAPES OF CLAY

NOVEMBER · 1927

GLADDING, McBEAN & CO.

RUSS BUILDING, SAN FRANCISCO

From a water-color by J. E. Stanton

George W. Kelham, Architect. Terra-cotta by Gladding, McBean & Co.

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The Russ Building, San Francisco

Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood, and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us.

Let your watchword be order and your beacon, beauty.

—D. H. BURNHAM

THE Russ Building gives a new character to the sky-line of San Francisco. The line sagged between the Telephone Building on the south and the Nob Hill hotels on the north until the Russ Building arose to lift it midway and lend it harmonious undulation from peak to peak. Before, it was at best an impressive sky-line; now it is become a line of true beauty.

That the Russ Building was studied with relation to the San Francisco sky-line admits of no doubt. The huge structure would never have taken the form we know unless this consideration was ever-present to the mind of George W. Kelham, its architect.

The architect who sets out to modify the sky-line of a city assumes a heavy responsibility. It is a task that calls for all he has of "fortitude and delicacy." If he fails, it will be generations before the visible and substan-

tial evidence of his failure is destroyed. If he is to succeed, he must have an imagination strong in the visualizing faculty. His mind's eye must see his unbuilt tower where you and I see only an open sky of sunshine or clouds. He must be sure that his invasion of that open sky is justified by a dream of beauty capable of taking tangible shape without losing its magic. Truly, this is an adventure not lightly achieved. The sky does not patiently endure mediocrity. It has its quiet method of revenge upon blunderers. Fortunately, San Francisco's sky has been scaled by artists.

View the Russ Building from afar—from the bay or from any of San Francisco's seven times seven hills—and its success of beauty speaks to you without faltering. The silhouette is noble; it has significant form; if you are sensitive to architectural impressions, it tells a number of stories—one in sunlight, another in the mist, another by moonlight, and still another when artificial light conjures its bulk out of surrounding darkness.

The Russ Building rises to its thirty stories of height in compact unity, but may be divided for the purpose of description into a central mass supported either side by wings sixteen stories high. Above these wings the central mass soars towerlike in a series of carefully studied set-backs. The building occupies the entire Montgomery Street frontage, west side, from Bush Street to Pine, with a main entrance centrally placed on Montgomery, and garage entrances on Bush and Pine. It has the shape of an E whose down stroke is the Montgomery Street frontage, while the central mass and the wings represent the horizontal strokes of the letter; these last extend westward to form courts open to the setting sun.

This is not the place to recount the marvels of engineering and physical equipment embodied in the Russ Building. "A modern building," says Lewis Mumford, "is an establishment devoted to the manufacture of light, the circulation of air, the maintenance of a uniform temperature, and the vertical transportation of its occupants." How these and other problems were solved in the Russ Building by the architect, by H. J. Brunnier, the structural engineer, by Hunter & Hudson, the mechanical engineers, and by the Dinwiddie Construction Company, general contractors, all who are interested have had ample opportunity to learn. As the greatest office building on the

Pacific Coast, the Russ Building sums up everything that American builders have ever learned. Not its efficiency, but its beauty, with the secret thereof, is being considered here.

George W. Kelham designed the Russ Building in a modern adaptation of perpendicular Gothic. He relied primarily upon the upward leap of the masses to give his structure beauty, and used ornament with carefully considered restraint. The main entranceway alone shows any approach to exuberance—if the word may be applied to a treatment that evokes the noble soul of Gothic ornament by means of a few motives perfectly composed. Mr. Kelham did not seek to overwhelm the pedestrian passing to and fro on narrow, crowded Montgomery Street; he desired to inspire the onlooker from afar who is capable of being thrilled at the sight of sunlight glorifying the mass of a great tower. This tower has ornament on a grand scale, as becomes its position at an elevation that dwarfs "the topless towers of Ilium."

Terra-cotta for the facing of skyscrapers has very definitely established itself in the United States, and notably with the architects of the Pacific Coast. Its lighter weight recommends it over other comparable materials; likewise its permanence, its wide range in color and texture, and the plasticity that permits the exact rendition of all ornament, no matter how elaborate or delicate.

These considerations must have been present to the mind of Mr. Kelham when he selected terra-cotta for the Russ Building.

The entire structure, with the exception of the courts, is clothed in terra-cotta specially manufactured by Gladding, McBean & Co. It is a buff Pulsichrome with a rustic surface, a very handsome "shape of clay." The courts are faced in a coated brick of a warm buff tone, also manufactured specially for the building by Gladding, McBean & Co. The harmony of terra-cotta and face brick in color and texture interprets admirably the unity imparted to the building by the architect.

The color and texture of the terra-cotta were determined by a special series of experiments conducted by the ceramic chemists of Gladding, McBean & Co. in co-operation with Mr. Kelham. These experiments de-

veloped a terra-cotta specially adapted to the monumental character of the building, and one with which the face brick chosen for the courts blends intimately and beautifully.

It is futile and to my notion aesthetically wrong to condemn or oppose the skyscraper. Old Icarus would not have looked more enviously at Lindbergh's silvery plane than would the builders of Amiens and Beauvais, could they stand in City Hall Square, and follow with astonished eyes the ascending shafts of the Woolworth Tower to a height that makes their own towering cathedrals seem puny and infantile. The skyscraper is far and away the most important architectural achievement of America, her great gift to the art of building. In its train has come the most brilliant era of structural engineering that the world has ever known. From the bottom of the lowest caisson, where one hundred feet below the surface the pneumatic drills have ground to a level the bones of mother earth, to the top of the highest pinnacle, where the staccato notes of the steel riveter drown out the hum of aeroplanes, the vast pile of the skyscraper is fraught with the best construction efforts of the American mind. The engineers, civil, electrical, mechanical, sanitary, have vied with each other in perfecting the application of their science, and the same emulation has existed among the trades — the masons, the carpenters, the plasterers, the glaziers, the painters; the setters of marble, of ornamental iron, of mosaic, and back of them the manufacturers of brick; the quarrymen who hew the stone; the great mills that saw the lumber and fabricate the cabinet work; the kilns that bake the terra-cotta; the furnaces that roll the steel. These with a myriad others form a vast army whose labors now constitute, next to agriculture, our greatest industry — an army that builds and does not destroy; an army whose march along the crowded ways of life is marked by monuments of stone and steel pulsating with human life, not by mute crosses in the poppy-fields.

THE STORY OF ARCHITECTURE IN AMERICA
— THOMAS E. TALLMADGE

SHAPES OF CLAY
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Edward F. O'Day, Editor

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THE architect, no less than the interested layman, will find much to engage his attention in *The Story of Architecture in America*, by Thomas E. Tallmadge, F. A. I. A. Opening this new book, one turns first of all to those pages in which he treats architecture on the Pacific Coast. There is a chapter on the Missions of California, and in telling the story of the "eclectic" period, from 1893 to 1917, Mr. Tallmadge has this paragraph:

"We must approach the work of a group of men on the Pacific Coast with much more respect. Led by the late Willis Polk, whose water temple at Sunol, California, is one of the loveliest things in architecture, certain architects, banded together in a common high ideal of beauty and fitness, have evolved a style so personal and so Californian that we sometimes fear it is hardly American. Men like Reginald Johnson, Myron Hunt, Louis Mullgardt, Francis Underhill, George Washington Smith, the Greenes who invented the California bungalow, and many others formed the group. Curiously enough, the first impetus to this Californian Renaissance in domestic work came from that Ariel of architecture, Bertram Goodhue, in the unbelievably beautiful Gillespie Villa at Santa Barbara, designed in 1902. This villa, perhaps, and the Spanish missions, too, furnished the cues from which has been produced the brilliant series of houses that have caused the palm for the best domestic architecture in America to be transferred from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast."

Of the P. P. I. E., Mr. Tallmadge says:

"The exhibition in San Francisco was . . . strikingly original in the use of great walled courts, and in its lighting. . . . It was the superior of any previous exhibition, including the Columbian, in that it produced a form of architectural decoration entirely suited for staff, and it gave us at least one masterpiece, the art palace by Maybeck."

Apropos of Mr. Tallmadge's reference to the Water Temple of the Spring Valley Water Company at Sunol, it is worthy of mention that this noble structure was one of the earlier examples to be roofed with our Small Mission tile. Willis Polk inspired this Company with enthusiasm for the picturesque old tile roofs of Latin countries, with their wide variation in color and delightful informality. The result was the evolution of the Latin tile series led by Cordova. The making of roof tile was revolutionized by these products.

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I · Russ Building, San Francisco — George W. Kelham, Architect

The architect scaled the San Francisco sky in a daring vision, and the completed reality has a noble significance of form. This picture, as well as that on our cover, speaks to every sensitive observer of beauty that completely transfigures utility.

II · Russ Building, San Francisco — George W. Kelham, Architect

The unity of the plan was borne out by the harmonious combination of terra-cotta and face brick. The former invests all the walls except those of the courts, which are of brick. Both clay products have a warm buff tone.

III · Russ Building, San Francisco — George W. Kelham, Architect

Perpendicular Gothic has been admirably adapted to the requirements of today in this towering sky-scraper. The terra-cotta was specially manufactured after a series of experiments by the ceramic chemists of Gladding, McBean & Co. in co-operation with the architect.

IV · Russ Building, San Francisco — George W. Kelham, Architect

The ornamental feature is the Montgomery Street entranceway. Here a selective taste emphasized certain Gothic motives that are both beautiful and dignified. The medium is terra-cotta, and the rendition by Gladding, McBean & Co. excites much admiration.

V ‹ Russ Building, San Francisco — George W. Kelham, Architect

The plasticity of terra-cotta is illustrated here, no less than its color value and texture. Our buff Pulsichrome shows to full advantage in this ornament which illustrates the carefully considered restraint of the architect in adapting Gothic to the needs of an office building.

GLADDING, McBEAN & CO.

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